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ABSTRACT

The role and methods of an evaluator of program effectiveness are discussed. Responses to questions prepared by academicians were obtained from three evaluation practitioners; an external, independent evaluator; and an internal evaluator with program implementation responsibilities. Practitioners uniformly indicated that internal evaluators were not constrained in methods by virtue of their positions. It was also agreed that all evaluators need a variety of skills from interpersonal and technical to project management. Organizations can make a cost-effective decision to use internal evaluation without compromising the quality of the evaluation. (SLD)

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UTILIZATION OF THE EVALUATOR: ISSUES SURROUNDING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND THE USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS

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UTILIZATION OF THE EVALUATOR: ISSUES SURROUNDING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND THE USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Training is big business within business and industry (estimated at $40 billion to over $200 billion, depending on the source and whether employee salaries are included in the estimate). As the training function matures and grows more sophisticated, formal evaluation approaches will play a major role in quality assurance for educational/training programs. Houston (1986) identified companies like Boeing, Disney, Motorola and Arthur Andersen & Co. for whom evaluation is explicitly integrated into the training efforts. Other areas of business will also continue to use evaluation skills to assess program effectiveness (e.g., health benefits, corporate culture programs, compensation plans) and to aid decision makers.

There are three basic ways for companies to provide the needed evaluation services:

1. An EXTERNAL procurement strategy, in which management hires independent evaluators, that are not permanent employees of the company and are independent of the project team or program managers and developers.

2. A DEPARTMENTAL strategy, in which an evaluation/quality control department is formed to establish an internal (to the company) group that is independent of the project team or program managers and developers.

3. An INTERNAL, embedded strategy, in which a project team member or program personnel are responsible for conducting the evaluation and maintaining quality control.

It is important, as businesses consider these options, that they address the issues related to the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation, as well as the dollar cost to have the evaluation done.

House (1986), referring to the strong trend in government agencies to move from external to internal evaluation, said, "...(T)he practice of evaluation has been substantially transformed by the growth of internal evaluation, and we should be paying serious scholarly attention to the new demands and opportunities of this transformation." (p. 64). It is our purpose in this paper to provide some perspectives on a similar transformation that we believe is underway in business and industry.

Some problems faced by the internal evaluator have been identified. For example:

> The internal evaluator's objectivity may be affected by their frame of reference; they may be less able to challenge basic organizational or program assumptions; and the internal's credibility might be lower than the external's (Nero, 1983; Patton, 1986; Weiss, 1972).
>
> Internal evaluators may become a public relations tool of the administrators; they may confuse the interests of individual managers or administrators with those of the organization (House, 1986; Patton, 1986).

Internal evaluators may foster routinization of the evaluation process and thus reduce the usefulness of the evaluation results (House, 1986).

On the other hand, internal evaluators sometimes have distinct advantages in an organization:

Internal evaluators may reduce evaluation costs (Beer and Bloomer, 1986; Patton, 1986).

Internal evaluators allow for quick correction to evaluation designs when the evaluation activity is not productive (Cronbach, Ambron, Dornbusch, Hess, Hornik, Phillips, Waller, and Weiner, 1980).

Internal evaluators can more easily promote use of results and obtain stakeholder commitment to the process (Beer and Bloomer, 1986; Patton, 1986; Weiss, 1972).

Internal evaluators help to build or assure an institutional memory for a program (Patton, 1986).

Internal evaluators know more about the nuances and inner workings of the organization (Patton, 1986, Weiss, 1972).

In order to expand and provide context sensitive reactions to the key issues surrounding a decision to use internal or external evaluators, we assembled two groups to engage in a formalized dialog. One group was made up of academicians who developed a set of questions to be addressed by the second group. They were:

Dr. R. Tony Eichelberger of the Department of Educational Research Methodology, University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Eichelberger is the editor of Evaluation Practice, and an author in the areas of statistics and evaluation research.

Dr. Jeri R. Nowakowski of the Department of Educational Administration, Northern Illinois University. Dr. Nowakowski, a past president of the Evaluation Network, is Director of the Office of Educational Evaluation and Policy Studies at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of articles and books in the areas of school and program evaluation.

Dr. Thomas A. Schwandt of the Center for Educational Development, University of Illinois-Chicago. Dr. Schwandt is an editorial reviewer for several professional journals and an author in the areas of qualitative evaluation and auditing the evaluation process.

The second group was composed of three evaluation practitioners (one to represent each of the three previously defined strategies for providing evaluation services). They are:

Dr. Tara Davis Knott, President of Evaluation Resources, Inc., Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Knott is an external, independent evaluator.

Kimball C. Kleist, Manager, Research and Evaluation, Center for Professional Education, Arthur Andersen & Co. Mr. Kleist is responsible for an internal, independent evaluation department.

Dr. Colleen L. Larson, Manager, Organizational Development, Helene Curtis, Inc. Dr. Larson is an internal evaluator, responsible for program development, implementation and evaluation.

These evaluation practitioners prepared answers for the questions that were posed by the academician group.

THE DIALOG

The questions posed to the practitioners have been classified into five categories:

1. The evaluator's role;
2. Evaluation methods;
3. Credibility and communication of results;
4. Evaluating quality of the evaluation or evaluator skills;
5. Evaluation standards.

Within each of the categories, the questions or issues raised are presented and the responses from the three practitioner perspectives are given.

EVALUATOR'S ROLE

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Cronbach has advocated an internal role for the evaluator. Do you agree with him?

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INTERNAL: I believe there is a need and a place for both internal and external evaluators. The question is not which is better, but rather which evaluator can function most effectively given the situation. Internal evaluators have a responsibility to bring in external evaluators when they're better suited to complete the task. The difficulty may be in identifying when the external evaluator would be better suited. I think it is wise to listen to others in the organization to help distinguish when that is the case.

DEPARTMENTAL: Generally, I agree with Cronbach's position. Having an internal evaluator will increase access to specialized knowledge that is useful to product developers. When there is the risk that an internal evaluator will be perceived to be biased or to be operating in an area where they lack credibility it may be better to go to an external evaluator.

EXTERNAL: I disagree with Cronbach. First of all, I think his orientation is more toward social programs in which the evaluator is supposed to help insure program effectiveness by offering suggestions for improvement. Accountability, according to Cronbach, is not a major concern for evaluation.

In business, accountability is an extremely important concern. Unless a program can be demonstrated to have value to the organization, that program will not survive. Therefore, evaluators who work in business and industry must often be prepared to substantiate program effectiveness.

Further, evaluation results are often used to show that the program works for promotional purposes. Internal evaluators will have a difficult time convincing consumers that their organization's product or program is the best. In my opinion, this role is inappropriate for internal evaluators and can best be assumed by an external evaluator.

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Does the role of the client (and thus the evaluator) change in an internal evaluation unit so that the client is disproportionately empowered?

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INTERNAL: Certainly, the role is different. As an internal evaluator, you are part of the team. However, this is not necessary disproportionately empowering to the client. For example, as a Manager in Organizational Development, my role is to assist our divisions in organizational development efforts they wish to implement. I also have helped them to evaluate their efforts. I serve as a consultant to them in those efforts. I avoid "selling" my preferences. Rather, we discuss the pros and cons of a number of possible approaches, and collaboratively engage in a problem solving effort to define the approach that best fits the needs, interests, and concerns of the division.Their buy-in in the approach is crucial, because they will be the key players in carrying out the effort.

I am expected to hold to ethical standards and am rewarded for maintaining supportable practices within my division. When faced with a request to do something I consider unethical, I have to resolve it by going to higher management levels in the organization. If, sometime, I face a situation that I cannot satisfactorily resolve, I will have to make a decision about notifying the people involved and leaving the company, as would any external consultant asked to engage in unethical practices.

DEPART-MENTAL: Evaluators in our firm have responsibility to do what they, in their professional judgment, deem appropriate for a given set of circumstances. If an evaluator thinks that an indefensible approach is being recommended by a client, the evaluator has the responsibility to so advise the client and to promote the use of appropriate alternatives. On significant conflicts or concerns, the evaluator is expected to raise the issue to management levels to get the conflict resolved. Ultimately, the internal evaluator is an employee of the firm and may be expected to do work that is deemed appropriate by division management. If the department is inappropriately placed organizationally or the evaluator or evaluation management is weak then the client may be disproportionately empowered.

EXTERNAL: If the "client" for internal evaluations is also the manager who formulates the budget which includes the evaluator's livelihood, s/he may be overly empowered. However, a major contractor for an external evaluator may be likewise empowered. The client's role must be overtly clarified in either situation so that the evaluator feels free to report whatever s/he finds.

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Compare an external strategy and a departmental strategy in terms of costs and benefits.

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INTERNAL: I think the question of whether or not to hire an evaluator for internal purposes is often triggered by concerns about costs of external consultants. Certainly, if an organization doesn't do much evaluation an external consultant may be appealing.

Internal evaluators may prove to be more cost effective because they are readily available to respond to impromptu evaluation questions that may arise in business discussions. Having an evaluator on board also can help to spread evaluation expertise throughout the company. However, if an internal evaluator is not used, or the skills are not valued within the organization, the money would be better spent on an external consultant for a few high interest evaluation concerns.

DEPART-MENTAL: Assuming a full-time need for evaluation the cost advantage rests with the departmental approach. Efficiencies can be obtained through centralization of the function (and specialization within, e.g., data processing). Ready access to the expertise is a plus in this situation.

EXTERNAL: It depends on the amount and sophistication of the evaluation required. If the organization is heavily involved with evaluation, it may be more cost effective to maintain an internal evaluation staff. In this case, salaries and other evaluation costs could easily be justified by the benefits of having an in-house team and/or think tank for ongoing evaluation design and implementation. Further, departmental evaluators are already a part of the corporate culture and have intimate and immediate knowledge of the real power brokers on pertinent questions. When such attributes are important, departmental evaluators might be best used.

However, if evaluation is only conducted on a sporadic basis, expertise could probably be procured less expensively than it could be maintained in-house. Other advantages of procuring evaluation might include specialized expertise, the introduction of a fresh "eye" for the situation, the ability to more easily access top management, and lack of loyalty to any given organizational faction.

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Do clients have the same expectations of an evaluator in both a departmental and an imbedded internal program? What are those expectations?

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INTERNAL: This, again, is very situational and very organization dependent. Perhaps one of the greatest potential difficulties in a departmental and, perhaps more so in an embedded internal setting, is the fact that the evaluator actually becomes part of the team. Organization politics being what they are, there is a danger that people higher up in the organization will feel it is within their jurisdiction to order evaluators to do their bidding. But all situations are different. Though I am in an

embedded setting, I am evaluating the program I assisted in developing, I do not report to any of my clients. Nor am I evaluated by any of my clients.

Further, I come back to the issue of how important it is for an evaluator to explain the ins and outs of evaluation to those with whom they work and to ensure that they buy into that definition. All of that must be understood and laid out up front to avoid potential hazards down the road.

DEPARTMENTAL: I think client expectations would be about the same for departmental and embedded internal evaluations. Both clients should expect competent evaluators who control for whatever bias they may have. In both cases evaluation should be considered to be improvement oriented. The key difference between a departmental and an embedded internal is their amount of involvement in program development. With the embedded internal, there could be a vested interest by the evaluator in the existing product. There could also be "blind spots" in the evaluator's perspective of the product. For the departmental evaluator, there may be "blind spots" based on the organization's way of doing things, but these are less likely to cause product specific problems to be missed. Further, there can be a loss of appearance of independence with an embedded strategy.

EXTERNAL: I would think that the credibility of a departmental evaluator might be somewhat better than that of an embedded internal, since the departmental evaluator is more removed from the product or project than is the embedded one. Concomitantly, client expectations are probably somewhat different regarding departmental evaluators who are probably expected to be more objective than are embedded internals. Embedded evaluators are probably expected to behave more like team members and to offer more specific recommendations. The difference is only a matter of degree in terms of the perceived independence of an embedded and a departmental evaluator with regard to the evaluand.

Evaluation is no doubt viewed differently as a function of the evaluation strategy, i.e., embedded evaluators are probably expected to identify strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for program improvement whereas departmental evaluators may feel that it is their job to identify good or bad programs and to make recommendations about their continuing operation.

EVALUATION METHODS

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Are internal evaluators methodologically limited in their options?
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INTERNAL: I really don't see methodological limitation as an internal vs external issue. Certainly, methodological limitation is dependent upon the skills of individuals, the size and availability of the evaluation team, and the willingness of the client to support new evaluation designs. But I would think these limitations would permeate all evaluation environments.

DEPART-MENTAL: No. If they are successful in communicating the benefits of a particular approach, and the client agrees that the bang will be worth the buck (or the intrusion, etc.) then anything goes.

EXTERNAL: No, in fact, internal evaluators may have more opportunity to enlighten their organizations to varied methodologies than do external evaluators. Further, internal evaluators might better maintain interest in evaluation results if they are collected and presented via different methodologies. For example, an advocate/adversary model is a good way to insure interest in the presentation of evaluation results if the audience is intimately involved with the project or program and does not require a formal report. An external evaluator may be less able to convince the client that any "nontraditional" approach is valid.

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Do internal evaluation systems risk routinization? What is the value and risk of formalized and relatively rigid methodology in internal evaluation?

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INTERNAL: Certainly; routinization is always a risk of formalizing methods, tasks or procedures. Businesses do this readily to make operations more cost and time efficient. External consultants equally do it to decrease their time investment in proposal writing and materials preparation.

Formalization is not necessarily bad, however, the term "rigid" connotes an inflexible formalization. Lack of flexibility or ability to adapt to the demands of new issues and unique problems may well result in evaluation that is not responsive to unique client needs. That, of course, would be bad. Unfortunately, people do sometimes fall into the trap of trying to fit problems to formalized methodologies rather than using appropriate methodologies to address identified problems.

Additionally, evaluators must be encouraged to think. The danger of a "rigid" structure is that people will cease thinking beyond the "accepted approaches" because they soon find they are not rewarded for thinking but for following. Formalized methodologies should merely help to make the process more fluid because it documents what we know. The danger is when it is viewed as "all we know" or "all that matters."

DEPART-MENTAL: Yes, there is some risk associated with routinization. Any organization is interested in obtaining maximum efficiency through regularly employed procedures. If those regularly employed procedures lead to routinized responses to interviews or questionnaire items by program staff or to lowered use of the evaluation results, then there is a problem. Routinization, however, does not always need to have a negative connotation. If procedures that are routinely employed are sound, data sources change periodically, and results are used, then the only risk that is run is in the area of employee morale (assuming that purposes and context of evaluations are relatively stable). Morale should not pose significant problems either. There are few individuals that cannot be challenged in evaluation design or

instrumentation and who cannot improve upon what they have done in the past, even if the task is basically the same. Management has responsibility for helping to spark creativity within constraints.

EXTERNAL: Although most of us have a preferred approach, the variation in contracts and sponsoring organizations probably encourages external evaluators to attempt various approaches. The internal evaluator, however, must operate within a prescribed, rather predictable context. For example, an internal evaluator might know that s/he is responsible for an annual evaluation of each ongoing management development program. That sort of repeated task could become routinized -- especially if top management wants the same report in the same format each year. Further, if the evaluator is also a program staff worker, his/her evaluation time and expertise is likely to be rather limited which could also lead to routinization.

One value to formalized or routine procedures is that a data pool of salient information could be established and used to detect trends and changes over time. Further, once a specific methodology is entrenched, other, perhaps less experienced, evaluators could take over some of the evaluation implementation. This would free more experienced evaluators for other tasks.

A major disadvantage of a formalized methodology is that the consistent use of one or two methodologies could result in missed information about important program aspects. For example, a qualitative approach might yield useful results which the continuing use of the same quasi-experimental approach might fail to discover.

CREDIBILITY & COMMUNICATION

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How is the credibility of an evaluation affected by whether the evaluator is internal or external?

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INTERNAL: People are credible for several reasons and depending on the organization, different definitions will apply. There are some who say that anybody fifty miles from home is an expert, meaning that people you don't know are always more credible than anyone who works down the hall. With this view, any external consultant would have immediate credibility. Others say that credibility is established through productive working relationships that build trust and respect. These people might feel that anyone who works for their organization has got to be good, therefore, internal people who establish themselves as competent and reliable professionals will have high credibility.

Certainly, an evaluator, internal or external, must be perceived as credible if the evaluation is to be perceived as credible.

DEPART-MENTAL: The external evaluator supposedly has less of a stake in the outcome and may appear to be more willing to cut to the quick. This appearance of independence may give the external evaluator some credibility in some situations. On the other hand, the internal evaluator is a "known quantity" to program personnel and, therefore, can build a lasting and strong credibility over time. Part of the internal's credibility will rest on their knowing when to bring in an external evaluator on a project. In either case the evaluator should reasonably be expected to provide quality and comprehensive evaluation.

EXTERNAL: The demonstrated competence and professionalism of the individual evaluator, as well as the practical constraints of the contract, determine the quality and comprehensiveness of the information that can be obtained in an evaluation. The perception of his/her clients, as well as the evaluator's track record, determines the evaluator's credibility and that of his or her work. Unless the departmental or internal evaluators have demonstrated their credibility, the external evaluator may be perceived as more credible. Further, it would depend on who is judging the credibility of the evaluator. The internal evaluator's credibility may be high within the organization; however, it may be quite low if it is being judged by the organization's competitors or customers; it would be harder to convince someone outside the organization that a program worked if that program were evaluated internally than if it had been evaluated externally.

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How does an internal evaluator (in either a departmental or embedded strategy) establish and maintain a reputation for independence and objectivity. How do internal evaluators avoid biting the hand that feeds them?

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INTERNAL: My objectivity, as for any evaluator, would have to rest in the data. I see evaluation as one part of the development process. It is one more tool to use to help us better attain our goals. It is important to note the mindset that is established before an evaluation. I do not conduct an evaluation to establish my credibility as an OD Manager. That is done on a daily basis with people throughout the organization. I posit evaluations as a process for problem identification and resolution. We don't identify problems to place blame. We identify problems to seek solutions. My professional competence and expertise rests in producing an evaluation that is reliable, confirmable, and useful. I am "biting the hand that feeds me" if I don't produce those kind of results.

DEPART-MENTAL: Objectivity is demonstrated by telling it like it is. It is assured by establishing and following quality assurance guidelines for evaluation design and through balanced reporting of evaluation results. Independence is a relative thing. Internal evaluators and product developers all work for the same entity and are vested in the production of quality programs. Organizational sanction and management support (and perhaps protection) for the independent evaluation function is essential. The single best way for the internal evaluator to avoid "biting the hand that feeds them" is to try to push sponsorship of the evaluation to a high enough level in the organization that the primary client is one who clearly wants a full and impartial view of the program or project.

EXTERNAL: I think internal evaluators must establish a reputation for being "fair and tough." Otherwise, they will stand a good chance of being co-opted by political and/or peer pressures. Of course, this active attempt at objectivity or independence may result in the loss of friends and the trust of co-workers! However, the choices for internal, especially embedded, evaluators seem to be the possibility of losing peer status or the assured loss of personal, and/or professional respect by oneself and one's peers.

Unless limited to formative evaluation internal evaluators must occasionally risk biting the hand that feeds them. Therefore, internal evaluators must learn to present solid information as a basis for negative results. Further, they might present negative results along with positive ideas for improvement.

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Are there some types of evaluation (or some kinds of evaluation questions) that are better suited for one of the three types of strategies (i.e. external, departmental, internal)?

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INTERNAL: I think that the level of internal trust in an organization has much more to do with the hiring of outside consultants than does actual appropriateness. Certainly, there are highly political and confidential evaluations that are conducted in organizations that may at the outset appear to be more fitting for outside services, however, in organizations characterized by high levels of internal trust, people would be more confident about sharing confidential information with "their own" than with an "outsider." I think the single greatest factor here is organizational climate.

Legitimately, I think that highly sensitive evaluations, for example those that may result in loss of jobs, demotions, unpopular reorganizations, etc., may cause less problems for an external evaluator. The repercussion often triggered in this type of evaluation may pose ongoing difficulties for internal evaluators trying to reestablish themselves as part of the organizational team.

DEPARTMENTAL: An external evaluator may be preferred when appearance of independence is critical or where there is risk to the bearer of bad news. The repercussions of wanting to kill the outside messenger (external evaluator) are likely to be less disruptive to the organization than they would be if an internal evaluator were used. Additionally, internal evaluators may want to use externals for leverage, that is, to accomplish a greater volume of work or to manage peak loads. They may use externals for an infusion of new ideas, (i.e., for professional development) or for peer reviews of work performed, if credibility/objectivity is questioned.

A departmental strategy works best when the volume of evaluation work justifies it and efficiencies can be obtained through centralization of the function. The embedded internal is called for when intimate knowledge of the object of the evaluation is essential.

EXTERNAL: Internal evaluators are well suited for formative evaluations because of their familiarity with the organization and, possibly, the program. Further, internal evaluators are already on-site and can be called upon quickly. In addition to formative evaluations, ongoing monitoring, pilot studies, and small studies which focus on specific program components or problems are probably best conducted by internal evaluators.

Conversely, external evaluators are most useful in situations in which certain evaluation skills are not available internally, when there is the possibility of a program's or person's termination, when sensitive internal data, which co-workers might not want to share with an internal evaluator, must be collected, and when the evaluation must be conducted by someone whose independence is unquestioned. For example, internally conducted evaluation findings may or may not be as readily believed by program opponents as would those found by an external evaluator. Finally, external evaluators are sometimes a funding, or otherwise practical, requirement.

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Does less bad news travel upward in in-house evaluation?

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INTERNAL: "Bad news" might not travel upward in an in-house evaluation system if the people involved are fearful of consequences. This may be true if the evaluators feel compelled to report only good news or news that coincides with management's perceptions. This situation could be magnified if the performance of the evaluator is evaluated by the people they fear delivering "bad news" to. Likewise, external evaluators may not deliver "bad news if they are fearful of unpopular outcomes or of not being engaged for additional services. In both situations, the result may be inaccurate or incomplete reporting of evaluation information. If the evaluation is properly placed in the organization and is well planned and executed this should not be a problem.

DEPART-MENTAL: In formative evaluations we do, the "bad news" is what program developers and evaluators are trying to find, so, there is no problem at all. We do emphasize balanced reporting, that is reporting the positive and the negative. Since most of our summative (i.e., go/no go) evaluations are on vendor programs, we do not have the internal status on them and therefore have few problems. On the occasional sensitive study we do, we try to get the project sponsored at a high enough level in the organization that the sponsor wants to know the unadulterated facts about the program. We have instances in which negative evaluation results are not reported by the primary audience to higher levels of management. Whereas, positive results are sometimes used for wider distribution by the client. These, however, are organizational communication characteristics and become evaluation issues only if evaluators withhold or are asked by the client not to report negative results.

EXTERNAL: Less formal bad news may travel up; however, the informal news which does get to top management during an internal evaluation may be more fragmented and less reliable than that which is formally obtained and/or presented. Internal evaluators, therefore, should probably make a concerted effort to explain to management the possibility of hearing premature or otherwise tenuous bits of information before the formal report is presented.

External evaluators may be more able to maintain a formal relationship with management. External evaluators should make every effort to insure that staff persons as well as management have ownership in the evaluation; this will increase the likelihood that information (bad or good) which reaches management will not be subterfuged by staff persons or lower levels of management.

EVALUATING QUALITY OF EVALUATION

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To what extent is the quality and value of information generated in an evaluation affected by whether the evaluation is carried out by an internal or external evaluator?

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INTERNAL: I believe that the quality and value of information generated in an evaluation is highly dependent upon the skills of the evaluator. Assuming equal skills, internal evaluators may be able to dig deeper, faster because they are intimately involved with the content and the issues. There would be no learning curve for them to overcome as they begin the evaluation. However, they must also be careful not to let this knowledge unduly guide the evaluation process.

DEPART-MENTAL: Quality is driven by evaluator competence. Value is driven by the extent to which the client is disposed to use the results of the evaluation (the evaluator may be able to influence value somewhat through user-friendly reporting of findings). Except for the rare instance where the evaluator's perceptions are unduly affected by contact with the organization or by an overly empowered client, the fact that the evaluator is internal or external should not matter.

EXTERNAL: If the information which was needed to make a decision is accurate and delivered on time, the value of the information probably does not really vary depending on whether the evaluator is internal or external. The perception of the information's value may, however, increase if the evaluator is external; i.e., the "outside" expert.

If an internal evaluator has good evaluation knowledge and skills, the information quality is probably high. Conversely, if the external evaluator is ill-trained, the quality of the information s/he provides may be quite low. Except for the clients' perceptions of the value of the information, there is probably no real difference between internal and external evaluators regarding value or quality of information.

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What criteria should be used to choose an external, independent evaluator and how should his/her performance be evaluated?

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INTERNAL: This is a serious problem in organizations. It is not uncommon to find people in organizations who know nothing about evaluation; therefore, they are at the mercy of any consultant who comes in claiming to be an evaluator. Further, because people know little about evaluation, there is sometimes a tendency to underestimate the need for skilled competence. "What's so tough about throwing a survey together?" The word does need to get out. Incernal evaluators can be helpful in educating organizations on evaluation issues. But if an outside evaluator is to be retained, any internal evaluation expertise should be used to help assess the skills of the external evaluator.

The evaluation skills that are sought must correspond with the needs of the evaluation. For example, an evaluation that will be highly interactive will require an evaluator with not only technical skills, but with strong interpersonal skills, facilitation/mediation skills and considerable expertise in negotiation. The evaluator should be capable of exploring data for multiple meanings and should be comfortable with having people in the organization participate in the evaluation. The evaluation must be open. We would want to see the raw data. We would want to see how the evaluator categorizes qualitative information. Not all evaluators would be comfortable with, or capable of this kind of open evaluation approach.

DEPART-MENTAL: Management should look at the evaluator's track record, review products, and assess the evaluator's interpersonal ability. A formal agreement, detailing activities and deliverables expected from the project should form the basis of evaluating the evaluator's performance.

EXTERNAL: Track record and expertise requirements are the major criteria to use in purchasing evaluation expertise. Management should talk with others for whom the evaluator has worked and, if possible, review past work. The registry suggested by Scriven in the early 1980's is a good idea regarding an evaluator's track record.

Further, an organization might need an evaluator who has specific expertise (e.g., in tests and measurement) that would become a major criterion upon which to select an evaluator. Other criteria might include the evaluator's familiarity with the field of the evaluand and/or professional reputation; e.g., publications. Cost is another dimension which must be considered when evaluation expertise is purchased; some evaluators may simply charge more than is budgeted.

Performance might be judged by the degree to which the information needed was actually obtained in a valid manner and presented in a timely (or agreed to contractually) and understandable form. Other dimensions such as value for cost, technical adequacy, professionalism, and ability and availability to clearly answer questions following the conclusion of the evaluation are also important and can be used to judge his or her performance. Ideally, a meta-evaluation should be conducted; however, time and budget restraints might preclude this arrangement.

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How is the quality of evaluations in an embedded or departmental strategy monitored and evaluated? Who is responsible for this quality control?

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INTERNAL: At Helene Curtis we have set up our evaluation to go through both our Planning and Administration Committees at different points in the evaluation. This is not unlike quality review checks built in proposals by external consultants. However, I believe it is rare to find that the people responsible for the quality review are knowledgeable of evaluation methodology and procedures. Typically they are VPs or managers who know their content and are interested in the project, but offer little in the way of technical review. The quality reviews are usually more informational updates than quality reviews.

DEPARTMENTAL: Quality assurance is maintained through the skills and professional development (continuing education) of the evaluator and through review of engagement memos (study design proposals) and reports by management within the evaluation group. Generally accepted standards for conduct of work, evaluation models, the standards, internal methodologies, and management judgment form the basis for these reviews.

EXTERNAL: Although I am not as familiar with internal evaluations as with external ones, it is my experience that internal quality control may be somewhat slack. Evaluation expertise is sometimes lacking and may result in only one method being used and/or accepted as valid. This surely constrains internal evaluators who must fulfill certain pre-established expectations that information will always be collected and presented in the same way. Further, if the evaluation client lacks evaluation expertise, s/he may not realize that the study was inadequately designed and/or conducted.

Since internal evaluations would, like any evaluation, be subject to rapid extinction if they were not useful and timely, criteria which are probably always applied include the degree of usefulness and timeliness for decision making. Criteria such as adherence to standards or to a recognized methodology may or may not be used to judge internal evaluations depending, again, on the expectations and expertise of the clients and/or the personnel responsible for oversight.

Finally, if quality control does take place, it is probably the responsibility of the head of the department (departmental) or the project director (embedded). Unless the department is an evaluation department, quality control may be inadequate because the department head in, say, training, or the project director may not have specific evaluation expertise by which to judge the evaluation or the evaluation may be judged by standards which are more applicable to another discipline; e.g., experimental research.

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Regardless of strategy, what skills must an evaluator possess to function effectively in a business/industry environment?

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INTERNAL: Sense of urgency--deliver when you say you will. Speak the client's language (both verbal and written). Understand the business world. Don't be tied to a methodology but be able to adapt to company needs/constraints. Know when to say you are out of your area of expertise.

DEPARTMENTAL: Evaluators should have good technical and interpersonal skills. The technical skills include expertise in a variety of study designs, instrument development, data gathering and analysis techniques, and excellent writing skills. Interpersonal skills include tact, communication skills, rapport building, listening skills, selling or persuasion skills, etc. Evaluators also must be flexible. There is no room for dogmatic attitudes (except with respect to the appropriateness of dogmatic attitudes). They should have project management skills, planning and executing projects on a timely, cost-effective basis; and an understanding of and acceptance of business motives. A "consultant" mentality, knowing the client and their business problems and concerns is also required for long-run success.

EXTERNAL: Aside from a good knowledge of evaluation premises and methodologies, evaluators who function in a business context must become and remain aware of management's priorities. This is not what evaluators are typically taught; i.e., most evaluators are (rightfully) concerned with how well a program works for its consumers; however, they fail to recognize the importance of managers as a consumer group. For example, the bottom line may be more important to the evaluator's managerial client than the "social good" obtained by the evaluand. So evaluators in business must learn to tease out the needs and wants of managers as well as program clients and/or staff.

A conscious effort to provide information on time and with the most efficiency is also extremely important and appreciated in business and industry. Deadlines are crucial in business and industry since in business those who don't deliver the right stuff at the right time have short careers.

Further, business evaluators should be able to communicate clearly with all levels of management and to relate conclusions to practical recommendations. They should also make an effort to learn some of the business's jargon so that they understand what is actually being said and can respond to questions appropriately.

Finally, business evaluators should know something about various organizational styles so that they can recognize a top-down or other sorts of management schemes.

STANDARDS

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To what degree can and should professional evaluation standards play a role in internal evaluation?

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INTERNAL: Professional evaluation standards should play a role in internal evaluation to the extent that they enhance the quality of the evaluation and to the extent that management accepts them as quality standards.

Certainly, internal evaluation should be reliable and confirmable. To the extent that the evaluation standards help us to attain a consistently high level of quality, they should be used. However, management must buy in and that is true for internal, as well as external evaluators. Unfortunately, these standards are not very well known outside of the evaluation community so it is incumbent upon the evaluator to bring that information to his/her management.

DEPARTMENTAL: They can and should play a significant role, in that any procedure followed should be defensible.

EXTERNAL: In intent, evaluation standards should be maintained no matter what the context. Practically, however, some of the standards may be difficult to implement on an internal basis. For example, internal evaluators might have difficulty maintaining standard C2, conflict of interest, if they are charged with the summative evaluation of a program which could result in others or in the department losing professional stature.

SUMMARY

When an organization makes a decision to use internal evaluators there are several issues that should be considered. Among these, at a minimum, are the role of the evaluator, the effects the decision may have on evaluation methods used, the credibility of the evaluator, and on communication of evaluation results. In addition, the criteria for evaluating evaluators and their work and the applicability of evaluation standards should be considered.

We brought together several evaluators--some representing the academic side of the discipline and some representing employed or private evaluators. The "academics" posed a number of questions and issues to which the practitioners responded. The dialog covered the areas noted above.

In general, there was strong agreement among the academics about what issues should be raised and among the practitioners about the meaning and conclusions to be drawn about the issues. Regardless of the practicing evaluator's position (internal, departmental or external), most questions led to consideration of the same variables, even though the points of view occasionally were divergent.

There was agreement that the evaluator's role may be significantly influenced depending on whether the person is a consultant or an employee. It was also generally agreed that, except in unusual circumstances, most of the role issues could be appropriately controlled by the evaluator and organization management.

Whether internal evaluators would be constrained in the methods they used was a significant issue for the academic questioners. The practitioners, while recognizing both positive and negative potentials for routinization of methods for either internal, external or departmental evaluators, uniformly indicated that the internal evaluators were not constrained in methods by virtue of their positions.

The area in which the greatest difference was noted between internal and external evaluators was in issues of independence, sometimes seen as credibility. Internal evaluators were recognized as holding a position in which credibility can be built over a long, productive relationship with the employer. However, it was also recognized that in some instances--e.g., when evaluation results are to be used in assessing a product or services delivered to an outside client, and when the results are for the client's consumption--the internal's credibility is reduced by virtue of the position, regardless of the quality of the evaluation.

It was uniformly agreed that all evaluators need to have a variety of skills ranging from interpersonal skills to technical evaluation skills to project management skills. While the applications of these skills may vary from position to position, they were perceived as necessary to evaluator success. And, finally, it was agreed that the evaluation standards should play a significant role in governing the activities of all evaluators, even in those cases where implementation could be difficult.

Overall, there was much more agreement than disagreement about the issues surrounding internal versus external evaluation by these evaluation practitioners. All of the respondents recognized advantages and limitations inherent in the positions internal and external evaluators hold. The pervasive sentiment of the practitioners was that internal evaluators must look at the purpose and context of the evaluation study, along with audience and technical skill requirements, and make a decision for each study, whether to go to an external evaluator. It was also clear that organizations can make a cost-effective decision to create an internal evaluation staff without compromising quality of the evaluation effort.

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